

Welcome to the 20th annual Wayne County Challenge end of season celebration. 20 years of races...161 total. Who was here back in the beginning in 2003? I'm Brian Schleeper, race director of the IU East Run with the Wolves 5K. Today we're here to honor the overall and age group winners from the 2023 season and to recognize everyone who completed all eight races of the series. We also want to mention that the schedule for 2024 is set and there are schedule posters available and the season schedule is posted on the WCC website.

We are once again offering the Carpe Viam special which allows you to enter all eight series races at once, at a discounted rate. This year the program is available for \$140, a savings of \$20 over the course of the year on pre-registration rates, basically getting one race free, and \$60 off day of registration prices.

In 2024 we're again offering a Youth Carpe Viam package for \$100 for anyone fifteen or under. Signing up for the Carpe Viam program ensures that you get a shirt or other swag from each race. Online registration for both Carpe Viam specials is now open by going to the WCC website, wcchallenge.org.

The 20th season of the Wayne County Challenge was another excellent year with 15 first time winners, nearly half of the people who'll be recognized. And for the first time in quite a while the 2024 season will see a new race.

Now I'd like to recognize the remaining race directors for all their hard work:

Melissa Soper - Girls Inc. 5K: benefitting Girls Incorporated

Rick Duncan – Fireworks 5K: benefitting the Richmond American Legion Post 65

Paula Wilson & Amanda Nocton – Heartbreak Hill 5K: benefitting Hagerstown High School Athletics

Beth Newton –Great Pumpkin 5K: benefitting Main Street Richmond. Will take place Sept. 28.

*This race was formerly the Flying Eagle 5K and was put on by the Western Wayne PTO who no longer wished to continue holding the event. We appreciate their contribution to the WCC over the years and look forward to this new event. It has been held for several years so some of you may have run it, we're excited to have it join the WCC.

Sean Andreas– Fall Foliage 5K/10K: benefitting Cope Environmental Center

Mike Day -The newly renamed Pat Bowers Turkey Chase 7K: benefitting the Centerville High School Athletic Dept.

Kristi Cruse-Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K: benefitting the Richmond Parks Dept.

Additionally I want to recognize the other members of the Wayne County Challenge committee. Keith Morey is an at large member of the group and part of the timing team and Ashley Stephen who is our lead Timer.

Finally, I'd like to thank our series sponsor Hills Pet Nutrition. We're incredibly grateful for their support of the WCC and our mission to help people become more active through our events and appreciate having them on board in 2024.

Now let's move to on the awards. The mission of the Wayne County Challenge is to promote community health through amateur distance running. Our scoring system is designed to encourage and reward the participation of all types and ages of runners and recognizes both participation and competitive achievement. The 36 overall and age group winners and 71 recipients of the "Elite 8" award for completion of each event are examples of this mission.

Winners please come up when your name is called, we'll start with the overall awards first.

The third place overall female is Candi Walton. Candi ran three WCC events in 2019 and did all eight in 2022 on her way to taking the overall Female title. In 2023 she once again did every event, placing second in her division three times, first three times and was first overall female at the Flying Eagle 5K. In the remaining race she was fifth overall in the Fall Foliage 10K. She finished in a tie for this spot but won the tiebreaker with the fastest overall race time. Congratulations to two time winner and third place overall female Candi Walton.

The second place overall female is Chelsea Halderman. Chelsea is no stranger to awards when it comes to the WCC. From 2015-2019 she took five straight overall female titles. She returned in 2023 and took four age group wins, finished as third place female at the Run With the Wolves 5K and second overall at the Flying Eagle 5K.

She also participated in every race for the seventh time. Congratulations to six time winner and second place overall female Chelsea Halderman.

The overall female champion is Amanda Nocton. Amanda ran all eight races in 2023, starting the year by finishing second in her age group at the season opening Girls Inc. 5K and first in her division at the Fireworks 5K. These would be her lowest placings of the year. She went on to finish as third overall female at the Hagerstown Heartbreak Hill 5K.... **a race she co-directs**, second overall twice and was the female champion at the Flying Eagle 5K, Fall Foliage 5K and Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K. Congratulations to first time winner and overall female champion Amanda Nocton.

The third place overall male finisher is Joshua Cook. This is Joshua's second time winning a WCC award after taking the top spot in his age group in 2022. In 2023 he completed all eight races for the first time, finishing second in his division twice and first the other six races. Congratulations to two time winner and third place overall male Joshua Cook.

The second place overall male finisher is Gary Rodefeld. Gary began his WCC career in our very first year 2003, when he won his age group. He took his second division win in 2021 and was the Spirit of the WCC winner in 2022. In 2023 he ran all eight races, finishing third in his age group in the season opening Girls Inc. 5K and first in the remaining seven races. This year's second place overall male is four time award winner Gary Rodefeld.

The 2023 overall male winner is Matthew Beaty. Matthew ran all eight races and finished no worse than second in his age group, which he did twice. He had division wins at the Girls Inc. 5K and Run With the Wolves 5K. At the Heartbreak Hill 5K he was third overall male and took the overall title at the Flying Eagle 5K and Fall Foliage 5K. Congratulations to first time winner and overall male champion Matthew Beaty.

Now we'll move on to the age group winners. There are several categories where there was no winner because no one completed at least five races, a requirement to win an age group award.

The winner of the female nine and under age group is Kharri Green. Kharri ran seven of the eight races in 2023 finishing in the top three at all but one, including division wins at the Heartbreak Hill 5K, Flying Eagle 5K, Fall Foliage 5K and Pat Bowers Turkey Chase 7K. Congratulations to first time age group winner Kharri Green.

The winner of the male nine and under age group is Logan Turner. Logan ran all eight races finishing in the top four in seven of them, including runner up finishes at the Run With the Wolves 5K, Heartbreak Hill 5K and Flying Eagles 5K. Congratulations to first time winner Logan Turner.

The winner of the female 10-12 age group is Ember Montgomery. Ember ran every race in 2023 and finished in the top three in the division at each one.

She placed third at the Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K, second at the Girls Inc. 5K and Run With the Wolves 5K and took the win at the other five. Congratulations to first time age group champion Ember Montgomery.

The winner of the male 10-12 age group is Justin Stacy. Justin ran all eight races and had a season best at the Flying Eagle 5K where he was third in the division. This was the closest age group, male or female, as it was decided by one point...proving that every place and every second counts. Congratulations to first time winner Justin Stacy.

The winner of the female 13-15 age group is Lucy Burkhardt. Lucy ran all eight races and finished in the top five of the age group at all but one. This included three division wins at the Heartbreak Hill 5K, Flying Eagle 5K and Fall Foliage 5K. Congratulations to first time winner Lucy Burkhardt.

The winner of the male 13-15 age group is Carson Abney. Carson began running WCC races in 2022 when he ran seven of the eight and won his age group. He returned in 2023 and did all eight, placing third in the division once and second at the Girls Inc. 5K, Flying Eagle 5K and Fall Foliage 5K. Congratulations to two time winner and defending age group champion Carson Abney.

No winner of the female 16-18 age group

The winner of the male 16-18 age group is Caleb Gilland. This was Caleb's third year doing WCC races as he defended his age group title from 2022 in this division. In 2023 he did all eight races, finishing in the top five in the category of all but one, including a division win at the Heartbreak Hill 5K. Congratulations to two time age group winner Caleb Gilland.

The winner of the female 19-24 age group is Halle Osborne. After running six races in 2022 en route to an age group title, Halle did all eight in 2023. She had three third place and four second place finishes in the division on the way to her second straight title. Congratulations to repeat age group champion Halle Osborne.

The winner of the male 19-24 age group is Aaron Lake. Aaron has an impressive resume when it comes to the WCC. In his first season of 2018 he won his age group. In 2019 he was the overall Male champion and followed that up with a third place overall male title in 2021. He returned with another division win in 2023 by running in five races. He had two age group wins, was third place overall at the Run With the Wolves 5K, second overall male at the Flying Eagle 5K and overall male champion at the Heartbreak Hill 5K. Congratulations to four time winner and two time age group champion Aaron Lake.

The winner of the female 25-29 age group is Paige Gray. Paige ran all eight races and finished second in the age group at the Fireworks 5K and Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K. She took the win at the other six races. Congratulations to first time age group winner Paige Gray.

There is no winner of the male 25-29 age group

The winner of the female 30-34 age group is Darcy Talbot. Darcy ran all eight races and finished in the top four of the division at each one. She had age group wins at the Flying Eagle 5K, Fall Foliage 5K and Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K. Congratulations to first time winner Darcy Talbot

The winner of the male 30-34 age group is Kellen McCormack. Kellen ran all eight races in 2023 finishing third in the age group at the Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K, second at the Run With the Wolves 5K and winning the division at the remaining six races. Congratulations to first time age group champion Kellen McCormack.

The winner of the female 35-39 age group is Aubrey Hickey. Aubrey ran all 8 races in 2023 and placed in the top five in her age group at every one. This included two third place finishes, two seconds and division wins at the Flying Eagle 5K and Fall Foliage 5K. This is her third age group title after also winning in 2016 and 2017. This was also the closest women's category, decided by only 17 points. Congratulations to three time age group champion Aubrey Hickey.

The winner of the male 35-39 age group is Aaron Ervin. Aaron ran his first WCC race in 2010 when he completed all eight, a feat he repeated for the tenth time in 2023. He finished in the top five in the division five times, including a win at the Fall Foliage 5K. Congratulations to four time age group winner Aaron Ervin.

The winner of the female 40-44 age group is Brittni Gettinger. 2023 was the tenth straight year Britni participated in all eight races and her tenth time winning an award. Over her WCC career she has four age group wins, three third place overall female titles, finished second place overall female twice and was the 2021 overall female champion. In 2023 she was first in her age group six times, third place overall at the Fall Foliage 5K and volunteered at the remaining race. She finished tied for third overall female but lost out on a tiebreaker. Congratulations to ten time winner and age group champion Britni Gettinger.

The winner of the 40-44 male age group is Scott Meinardi. 2023 saw Scott take his sixth age group title, in addition to a second place overall male in 2021 and top male in 2022. In 2023 he ran seven of the eight races, placing second in his age group once, first four times and was second overall male at the Fall Foliage 5K. Congratulations to six time age group winner, Scott Meinardi.

The winner of the female 45-49 age group is Angel Shiverdecker. Angel ran all eight races in 2023 finishing second at the Fall Foliage 5K and Pat Bowers Turkey Chase 7K and taking the division win at the other six races. Congratulations to first time winner Angel Shiverdecker.

The winner of the male 45-49 age group is Dave Snow. In 2023 Dave did all eight races, for the 13th straight year. Over that span he has eight age group titles over three different divisions. He added his ninth in 2023 by finishing fourth in the age group four times and taking three wins.

He volunteered at the remaining race. He won the division by five points, which was the second closest men's race. The title came down to the final race at the Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K where he beat the second place finisher by seven seconds. Again, every place and second counts. Congratulations to nine time age group champion Dave Snow.

The winner of the female 50-54 age group is Meg Smith. Meg ran seven of the eight races finishing second in the age group at the Girls Inc. 5K and Run With the Wolves 5K and taking the top spot at the other five events. Congratulations to first time age group champion Meg Smith.

The winner of the male 50-54 age group is Jesse Jaynes. Jesse ran all eight races in 2023, for the eighth time, finishing in the top four in the category in every race. That gave him his fifth age group title, over two different divisions. Congratulations to five time age group champion Jesse Jaynes.

The winner of the female 55-59 age group is Missy Moore. Missy has now won her age group every year dating back to 2018, other than 2021 when she was the second overall female. She had five age group wins in 2018, six in all six races she ran in 2019, seven in 2021, along with a third place overall finish, and took the top spot in all eight races in 2022. She repeated this feat in 2023 with a clean sweep of the division. Congratulations to five time winner and four time age group champion Missy Moore.

The winner of the male 55-59 age group is Joel Flora. In 2023 Joel ran all eight races, finishing in the top three in each one, including wins at the Run With the Wolves 5K, Heartbreak Hill 5K and Fall Foliage 5K. This is his third age group win dating back to 2013. Congratulations to three time age group champion Joel Flora.

The winner of the female 60-64 age group is Sabrena Bartram. In 2023 Sabrena won her eighth straight age group title and ninth overall. She did all eight races, for the ninth time, taking the top spot in every race. She has won three different age groups over this period. Congratulations to nine time age group champion Sabrena Bartram.

The winner of the male 60-64 age group is Rod Waltz. Rod has been knocking on the door of an age group win for almost ten years, finishing second or third in his division four times since 2014. In 2023 he finally got his first division title. He ran six races, finishing second in the category twice and taking the top spot at the Run With the Wolves 5K, Heartbreak Hill 5K, Flying Eagle 5K and Fall Foliage 5K. He also volunteered at a seventh event. Congratulations to first time age group winner Rod Waltz.

The winner of the female 65-69 award is Annette Rodefeld. In 2022 Annette ran all eight races and won her age group. In 2023 she repeated both feats by finishing fourth in the division at the Fireworks 5K, second at the Pat Bowers Turkey Chase 7K and winning the division at the other six races. Congratulations to two time defending age group champion Annette Rodefeld.

The winner of the male 65-69 age group is Rick Moore. Rick completed all eight races in 2023 for the sixth time. This has helped him take four age group titles. In 2023 he added a fifth by finishing third in the category once, second five times and taking the top spot at the Heartbreak Hill 5K and Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K. Congratulations to five time age group winner Rick Moore.

The winner of the female 70-74 age group is Geri Schick. In 2023 Geri ran all eight races for the sixth straight season. It led to her fifth straight age group title as she took the top spot in the division at all eight races. She earned enough points to finish as the fourth overall female. Congratulations to five time defending age group champion Geri Schick.

The winner of the male 70-74 age group is Gary Girten. Gary has missed only two races since he began running WCC races in 2021 as he took his third straight age group title in 2023. He finished second in the category six times and took the win at the Girls Inc. 5K. Congratulations to three time age group winner Gary Girten.

The winner of the female 75-79 age group is Ellen Johnson. 2023 saw Ellen run five races, placing second in her age group at the Girls Inc. 5K and first in her four other races. That was enough to capture her sixth age group title. Congratulations to six time winner Ellen Johnson.

There is no winner in the male 75-79 age group.

The winner of the female 80 and over age group is Pat Bowers. Pat hasn't been beaten in her age group since the end of the 2012 season and now has fifteen division titles dating back to 2008. In 2023 she did seven races, with seven age group wins. To reflect her contribution to the WCC and the Turkey Chase she had the race named after her. Congratulations to fifteen time age group winner Pat Bowers.

There is no winner of the male 80 and over age group

Let's congratulate all of our age group and overall winners one more time.

Our next award goes to the most improved runner. This honor goes to the individual who shows the highest degree of race improvement over the course of the season.

The 2023 most improved runner will be making their second trip up after also winning their age group earlier in the program. This year's winner dropped their time from the season opening Girls Inc. 5K to the finale at the Rosemary Weigel Frostbite 5K by over twelve minutes. Congratulations to the 2023 Most Improved runner Ember Montgomery.

We've just given out 37 awards to the overall and age group winners, along with the most improved runner from the 2023 season. We commend and congratulate each of these individuals for their achievements and appreciate their support of the WCC and our member organizations.

Now we'll give out our final honor of the day, the Spirit of the Wayne County Challenge Award. This is the third time we'll be giving out this recognition but we've made a slight change to it in honor of a long time member of the WCC community that we lost this year, who exemplifies what this award, and the Wayne County Challenge, stand for.

Gene Black began running our races in the very first season of 2003. He won his age group that year, and the next seven seasons. He added four more titles along the way, including in 2022, which gave him age group wins in five different divisions and a total of twelve age group crowns. So clearly Gene was an accomplished runner. But he was also a fixture at our events, including the 2023 season's first two races. Sadly, Gene passed away not long after the Fireworks 5K.

To recognize the impact and contributions Gene made to the WCC over twenty years, we have renamed the Spirit of the Wayne County Challenge award in his honor.

This honor is intended to recognize someone who may not have the most podium finishes or race wins, but instead embodies our mission statement "to promote community and national health through amateur distance running...and to encourage and reward the participation of all types and ages of runners". This year's winner combines both high level race performance with the simple act of showing up.

The 2023 winner began their WCC career by running all eight races in their inaugural season, topping their age group and placing as third overall finisher. They continued their strong start over the next four years by finishing second, first, second and second in their age group. They also continued to show up for every race, every year, compiling a streak that continues today. They have run every event for 17 straight seasons, a total of 135 races, which is not only the longest active streak but also the longest streak ever for the WCC. If this doesn't embody our mission I don't know what does. The 2023 winner of the Gene Black Spirit of the Wayne County Challenge award is Judy Pierce.

We'll now present certificates and awards to the runners who completed all 8 races this season. We appreciate the dedication and support these individuals have shown to the WCC and the organizations that put on and benefit from each race. Congratulations to each of you. Please come forward when your name is called to receive your awards and please remain so we can take a group photograph.

Thank you again for attending today's event and for your support of the Wayne County Challenge and its member organizations. We look forward to our 21st year and the season opening Girls Inc. 5K, Saturday May 11. Remember online registration for the Carpe Viam program is now open on the WCC website wcchallenge.org